

If Ray Killed King, He Was Paid, Brother Says

by Martha Shirk

WASHINGTON — James Earl Ray's brother Larry says that if his brother did assassinate the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., someone must have paid him to do it, "because he don't do nothing without money."

Larry Ray made his statement to the House Assassinations Committee, which is looking into King's murder. Along with his other brother, John Ray, he denied having anything to do with the crime.

The brothers denied also any role in James Earl Ray's escape from the Missouri State Penitentiary in 1967 or in several bank robberies believed to have financed Ray's free-spending life as a fugitive before he was arrested in London in July 1968 and charged with King's murder.

Jerry Ray said that he "strongly believes" that King was the victim of a conspiracy that his brother might have become "unknowingly involved in."

The brothers made reluctant appearances under subpoena yesterday and Thursday. They were granted immunity from prosecution after they said their answers to some questions might be self-incriminating.

Even though they had immunity, neither said anything that linked him with his brother's crime, and both disavowed previous comments that they are said to have made to an author about their contacts with Ray as a fugitive.

The committee has spent two years investigating the possibility that James Earl Ray might have been part of a conspiracy to kill King, who was shot in Memphis on April 4, 1968, and that the FBI failed to investigate that angle adequately. Ray, who confessed to the crime but later recanted, was given a 99-year sentence for the murder.

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job, except with the National States Rights Party, a Georgia-based extremist group that applauded King's assassination.

When the committee's counsel implied that Jerry Ray was probably the mysterious

"Raoul," whom James Earl Ray contends plotted the King murder, he denied it.

"Raoul is still out there," he said. "I am definitely not Raoul."

Jerry said that he shared the view of

"millions of people" that King's death was the result of "a conspiracy, and somebody would have had to pay for it. I know James better than anyone else. He wouldn't do something for nothing."

The two days of hearings were characterized by persistent attempts by committee members and their counsel to establish that John and Larry Ray were unreliable witnesses and that their protests of non-involvement were not to be believed. Questions seemed designed to demonstrate that all three Ray brothers were racists and would have a motive for killing King.

But John Ray said that his attitudes on race were no different from those of any other lifelong residents of south St. Louis. He said that it was likely that he told an FBI agent in 1968 that his brother had "only killed a nigger . . . (who) should have been killed 10 years ago."

"I ran a tavern in a racist neighborhood," he said, a reference to the now-defunct Grapevine Tavern at 1982 Arsenal Street. "It's very possible I made that statement. The whole of south St. Louis makes statements like that."

John Ray, who was guarded by federal marshals throughout his appearance, now lives at 3541 Halliday Ave. in St. Louis.

Staff reports made available before the hearings indicate that the staff believes that both brothers were probably involved to some degree in the assassination and that the scheme was the brainchild of a group of racist Missouri businessmen.

"This much can be said with confidence at

this time," chief counsel G. Robert Blakey said Thursday. "If, in fact, there was a plot to murder Dr. King, as the evidence . . . strongly suggests, it is logical to assume that the convicted assassin was a party to it."

The evidence to which Blakey referred was testimony by three St. Louisans — Russell G. Byers of Rock Hill, St. Louis Criminal Court Judge Murry Randall and Clayton lawyer Lawrence Weenick. All three said that Byers was offered \$50,000 to kill King in 1967 by two segregationists from Imperial, Mo. Byers refused, by the committee staff thinks that news of the offer probably reached — and motivated — James Earl Ray.

Jerry Ray, the more articulate of the brothers and a self-described spokesman for the family, portrayed himself as a hard-working man whose perfect attendance at a watchman's job in Northbrook, Ill., would have made it impossible for him to have participated in either James Earl Ray's escape, a bank robbery in Alton in 1967 or the assassination.

"Check my work record," he said repeatedly, even after the committee indicated that the records had been destroyed.

Jerry Ray said that since the FBI and committee investigators began "hounding" him, he had been unable to hold down a